

**Opening Statement of Chairman Rob Bishop  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands**

“Examining the Consequences of Executive Branch Overreach of the Antiquities Act”  
May 2, 2017

Anybody who knows me knows that I typically don’t like to give opening statements at these hearings. But I felt as though I must speak out at today’s hearing about the misrepresentations surrounding Bears Ears National Monument.

Never in my 14 years of Congress have I seen such a concerted effort to suppress the voices of local tribes by such powerful, deep-pocketed opponents. No local tribe in San Juan County, Utah, where the National Monument is located, supported this designation. But most do not know this, because it is barely reported.

When my staff has called to correct reporters on their misrepresentations, they’ve been told the voices of these local Navajo are “unpersuasive.”

Members of this Committee have called Rebecca Benally, the Navajo woman elected to represent this area as a County Commissioner, a “token” Navajo who opposes the designation.

I cannot even begin to describe how disrespectful and demeaning this dismissive language is to her, and to the local people and tribes in this area.

So today, instead of using this time to give my opening statement, I’d like to read some comments from the local tribes in Utah, so that people will finally listen to them.

The Aneth Chapter of Navajo, which is the only Navajo chapter made up of tribal members exclusively from Utah and represents 50% of the Navajo in San Juan County, stated in a resolution that the National Monument would prevent “San Juan County Navajos and Ute Tribes from using the lands for the practicing of ceremonies, spiritual rejuvenation, gathering of herbs, firewoods, cedar poles/posts, hunting, and caretaking of sacred places.”

In a unanimously passed resolution from the Blue Mountain Dine’ Community, they stated that they “specifically disclaim the notion put forward by various environmental groups that their creation, the Dine Bikeyah, speaks for all local Navajos—they do not. We respect their intentions, and their efforts, but we disagree that the creation of an Inter-Tribal National Monument will be in the best interests and welfare of not only local Navajo people, but of all locals who love the land of their heritage.”

After the designation, Suzette Morris, a Ute Mountain Ute member, stated, “We have cemeteries up there and I don't want our ancestors to be put in museums” and “We all have a fight and we all are going to continue to fight for this to be rescinded.”

At our PLI hearing last September, Commissioner Benally stated:

“Bears Ears National Monument campaign is a cynical political stunt that, if successful, will deny grass roots Utah Navajos access to their sacred and spiritual grounds. Traditional Utah Navajo people depend on that land for their necessities of life: to gather medicinal plants, fire wood, piñon nuts, as well as to hunt and practice sacred ceremonies. Traditional Utah Navajo people are not conspiring with lawyers in board rooms in Salt Lake City and San Francisco. Traditional Utah Navajo people are not collecting \$20 million from the Hewlett and Packard foundations and Leonardo De Caprio to sponsor this toxic divide-and-conquer campaign. Traditional Utah Navajo people are not magazine environmentalists but are real stewards of the land whose interests will be destroyed by a Bears Ears National Monument. Grassroots Utah Navajo people do not support this effort to convert our sacred lands into a federal designation that will subjugate them to micromanagement by bureaucrats in Washington DC.”

And finally, a local group known as the Stewards of San Juan, who represent a diverse set of interests in the County and have local tribal representation on their Board of Directors, sent a letter to Secretary Zinke stating the following:

“The majority of Navajo and Ute residents in San Juan County overwhelmingly oppose the monument designation, in contrast to out-of-county/state tribes who know very little of this area and will simply not be affected by this monument. It is appalling that non-local voices have drowned out those who treasure this land the most.”

They continued that:

“This monument was designated in order to appease outside special interest groups. It was done WITHOUT a robust consultation with the stakeholders who actually live in San Juan County. Voices of life-long residents and tribal members have been, and continue to be, blatantly ignored. Non-government organizations such as the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, and Conservation Lands Foundation should never have the power to trump sovereign State rights, nor duly elected officials, no matter how big their wallets are. When the former Interior Secretary visited our state, she prioritized her time to meet with these outside groups and those that would only be marginally affected by the monument.”

I hope that those listening today will remember these voices, the ones that have been excluded from this conversation and the ones that President Obama ignored when he designated Bears Ears National Monument.